

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH AIR FORCE GENERAL ROBERT
MCMAHON, DIRECTOR, CENTRAL COMMAND DEPLOYMENT AND DISTRIBUTION OPERATIONS
CENTER SUBJECT: CENTCOM DEPLOYMENT AND DISTRIBUTION OPERATIONS CENTER'S
ROLE IN MOVING U.S. FORCES INTO AFGHANISTAN TIME: 11:03 A.M. EDT DATE:
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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG: So I would like to welcome you all
to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Wednesday, March
31, 2010. My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of the
Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating the call
today.

A note to the bloggers on the line, please remember to state
your name and organization you're with prior to asking your questions.
If possible, please place your phone on mute, as well. And if you have
to place your phone on hold, we might hear your hold music. So you might
want to exit the roundtable if you have to do some other business, and
then call back in. You're more than welcome to do so.

So today our guest is U.S. Air Force Major General Robert
McMahon. He's the director of Central Command Deployment and
Distribution Center. Without further ado, I'm going to turn it right
over to the general to start with an opening statement, and we'll go
straight into questions.

Sir, the floor is yours.

GEN. MCMAHON: Jennifer, thanks very much. And my thanks to DOD
Public Affairs for giving us this opportunity to communicate with a
number of folks that are interested in what we're doing.

As Jennifer indicated, I'm Major General Bob McMahon. I'm the
director of Central Command's Deployment and Distribution Operations
Center, or, as I'll refer to it as we go through, the CDDOC.

For those that may not be familiar with what the CDDOC does,
our mission is to optimize and synchronize strategic in-theater multi-
modal lift throughout the Central Command area of responsibility. And we
do that by teaming very closely with U.S. Transportation Command and its
components.

Our focus is on providing oversight of both deployment and sustainment requirements within our area of responsibility. And that includes oversight of passenger, equipment and cargo movement. Our goal very simply is to ensure that we are as effective as possible -- underscoring the word "effective" -- in supporting warfighter requirements while being as efficient as possible -- underscoring "efficient" -- from the taxpayer's perspective.

Now, to accomplish our mission, some of our key initiatives include, first of all, our intratheater channel program. The program provides dedicated, reliable airlift between air hubs, which is key for passenger and cargo planning. And in essence, it provides the warfighter with a scheduled busline in the air.

The frequency of flights is based upon the warfighter's needs and utilizes our C-17 and C-130 flights servicing both Iraq and Afghanistan. And it's built around a hub-and-spoke system similar as to what you'd find in commercial industry. And we have two main hubs in each of the two countries. The i-channel system, as we call it, serves as the main transportation mode for R & R passengers traveling to and from Kuwait, which introduces my second initiative that I'd like to talk about, our rest and recuperation, or our R & R, program.

We serve as Central Command's agent responsible for tracking and facilitating inter- and intratheater airlift in support of the R & R program. The program allows those military personnel authorized to take R & R leave to rapidly move from a theater airhub to the location of their choice and then back again to the hub.

Our focus is on finding a balance between ensuring the traveler gets a needed break from austere conditions found in the theater with a need to minimize the time they are away from the unit.

Now, integral to the success of the R & R program is leveraging the capacity of the i-channel system that I just talked about to provide a consistent and reliable number of seats to move our R & R passengers. And we're obviously constantly looking for better ways to minimize the service member's time away from the unit, and to try to make this process as efficient as possible.

A third key initiative I'd like to mention is our Theater Express Program. This initiative provides additional capability for intra-theater multi-modal lift throughout the Central Command area of responsibility by employing commercial opportune lift for DOD cargo that can't be moved through organic means. The intent of the program is to use existing commercial capacity and networks to move sustainment cargo to ease the requirement for organic lift within the theater. And we accomplish this by offering to a competitively select group of carriers the opportunity to carry our cargo utilizing their excess capacity.

A fourth initiative I'd like to mention is our Intra-Theater Airlift Request System or our ITARS system. Now, in a perfect world, all intra-theater airlift moves could be accomplished utilizing our i-channel system that I talked about previously. Now, the reality is that

every day there's a myriad of requirements that bubble up that necessitate a unique intra-airlift request be generated. There's a myriad of reasons that happens, but include that a warfighter needs delivery of passengers or cargo on a specified day, and can't wait for the next scheduled flight.

War cargo and passengers may have a very special priority that requires a unique mission. Or when the movement becomes our highest priority and can't wait for its scheduled flight, we utilize ITARS. And this applies, most importantly, to the movement of our fallen heroes. In any given month, approximately 75 percent of our intra-theater airlift movements are accomplished by way of the ITARS system.

Finally, a fifth initiative that I'd like to mention is our single-ticket tracker program. This program ensures that deploying servicemembers have a pre-identified intra-theater flight; in essence, a follow-on ticket for onward movement to a theater hub from the strategic hub where they landed. It also ensures that redeploying servicemembers have a pre-identified flight from their originating hub back to the strategic hub in time to catch their strategic flight home. And this becomes especially important for an individual augmentee who doesn't benefit from the type of dedicated airlift that would be utilized to support large unit moves.

Well, in addition to the initiatives I've just described, let me mention just a couple of issues that may be of interest to you that, I will tell you, keep me awake at night. And I'd be happy to discuss any of these further during the question and answer period.

First and foremost, the thing that concerns me is ensuring that we properly and effectively deploy MATVs and MRAPs into Afghanistan.

Secondly is the flow of cargo and equipment across the ground lines of communication supporting Afghanistan.

Third is the flow of passengers and equipment through our Afghanistan aerial ports.

And, finally, the fourth is execution of the responsible drawdown in Iraq.

And, again, I'd be happy to talk about any of these in greater detail during the question and answer period. Let me conclude my statement by saying that logistics can serve as a positive force in nation building and counterinsurgency operations.

But we currently have several initiatives such as Iraq First, Afghanistan First and Central Asia States First that allow partner nations to get the first bid at commercial transportation contracts. In addition, we rely heavily on commercial trucking in both Afghanistan and Iraq, which not only supports our movement requirements, but also contributes to their respective economies.

One good focus area in particular we have in Afghanistan is to improve the infrastructure such as the airports, the roads and the rail lines. And, again, this not only benefits our force flow and sustainment requirements, but more importantly to me, it contributes to Afghanistan's future.

As an example, last week, I had the opportunity to visit the Northern Afghanistan region where I saw a new rail line being created from Hairatan, which is on the Uzbekistan border, down to Mazar-i-Sharif Region. Mazar-i-Sharif, which is the fourth largest city in Afghanistan, also just upgraded their airfield in conjunction with the German-led NATO focus -- or forces in the area. And by tying together the rail line that I describe with this improved air hub, what's being created in Northern Afghanistan will be a viable commercial multi-modal distribution hub that will serve them well into the future.

With that, I again thank you for the opportunity, and I look forward to your questions.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you so much, sir.

During your introduction, there were several people that called in. The last person I got marked down was Michelle (ph). Could I get everyone's names please, one at a time?

Q This is Jeff Schogel with Stars and Stripes.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Jeff. You're number five, right after Michelle.

Next?

Q Greg Grant with Defense Tech.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Greg. You're number six, after Jeff.

Next? Okay. I think I got everybody.

So, Chuck, you're first on the line. Please go ahead.

Q Okay. Did I take the mute off?

LT. CRAGG: Chuck, I can hear you (just so you know ?).

Q Okay. I can never tell.

Good afternoon, General.

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us. Chuck Simmins from America's North Shore Journal.

It sounds to me like you're running Delta Airlines, Federal Express, Maersk, shipping and a host of other diverse enterprises all at the same time.

How do you avoid relearning the lessons that the civilian side has already learned? Where -- how do you draw on the best practices of the civilian side to do what you do?

GEN. MCMAHON: Chuck, first of all, thanks for joining us. And that's a great question. What I would tell you is that per se I don't run anything. I facilitate a number of folks who provide that oversight. In particular, I rely on U.S. Transportation Command and their components, whether that's SDDC or Air Mobility Command, as well as intra-theater forces here to be able to draw their expertise to make sure all of this synchronization that should take place in fact does.

The other part that I would tell you, though, and I think it's tremendously important to underscore, is that the joint op organization that I have the privilege of being the director of has within it a variety of reserve officers and enlisted members. And many of those folks that we have that are part of the team come from private industry, and bring that expertise to the table.

So it is this composite team of active duty and reservists guardsmen and folks from across all spectrums of life that we bring together with their expertise in conjunction with the expertise that many of the carriers that you mentioned all -- we bring together that allows us to be as successful as we've been.

Q Thank you.

GEN. MCMAHON: Over.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Chuck.

Dale, you're next. Please go ahead.

Good morning, sir. This is Dale Kissinger from MilitaryAvenue.com. I have a quick question on the amount of airlift and how that's working for, you know, the whole theater surge into Afghanistan.

Are you having any shortages of, like, C-17, (C-)130 airlift that you need right now?

GEN. MCMAHON: Dale, I'll answer the question this way. If you were to ask any of the warfighters, there is always an infinite requirement for whatever it is they need in terms of logistics to get them what they need. And so I would never, never minimize their perspective.

But I'll tell you that we're moving things on time. To give you one data element, we have to move about 1,000 pallet position's equivalent every day somewhere into the theater. And that might be on inter-theater. It might be on intra-theater. Or it might be one on one

of the commercial carriers that we have, as I mentioned, in our Theater Express Program.

But we're able today to be able to move that thousand pallet positions of equipment utilizing the entire spectrum of airlift capabilities. So we understand that Transportation Command has a worldwide responsibility. And my job is to ensure that I've leveraged everything that's available, just not those C-17s or C-5s, to be able to get what we need in place on time. Over.

Q Okay. Super. That's great. I just asked that question based on being a C-17 pilot in the past, so I'm just curious how we were doing with the crews. Are the crews staying alive or are they working them too hard?

GEN. MCMAHON: I will tell you that -- and I had an opportunity to fly on a variety of flights regularly. We're doing everything we can to reduce the workload on our crews. We're trying to go to basic days where possible. We're trying to go to basic crews where possible. And as I talked earlier on, when I talk about the i-channel system, the scheduled airline concept, what that does is provide greater predictability for the warfighter and in doing so, allows us to build a more intelligent schedule, not only for our aircraft, but more importantly, for our crews to be able to provide the support they need to provide.

So that's helping us reduce some of the workload on our crews. Over.

Q All right. Super. Thank you very much, general. Thanks for your time today.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Dale. Richard, you're next. Please go ahead.

Q Good morning, general. This is Richard Lowry with Op4.com.

I'd like to speak to you for a moment about the drawdown in Iraq, and it seems that you have an enormous task ahead of you, yet there's a delicate balance. You sort of have a chicken and egg syndrome.

Can you speak to me about the planning and the amount of effort that's going to be required to draw our equipment down and keep a balanced movement so we maintain force protection?

GEN. MCMAHON: Richard, that's a great question. And oftentimes I think folks lose sight because of the plus-up that we have in Afghanistan, that they lose sight that we're still in conflict in Iraq. Certainly General Odierno has not lost sight of that nor any of the other senior military leaders over here.

But the challenge that he faces that I have to help facilitate success for is that he has to determine when the best time is to begin

that responsible drawdown. That's his call and my job is to support that.

So the challenge we have is to leverage all of the available tools and capacity that we have, both on the ground and in the air, to be able to support it, when he says go, that we're ready to go.

So I have literally as we speak, my deputy is up in Iraq today with a team working on exactly that planning to ensure we understand what his timing is, for the personnel and what that means before those personnel begin to flow out that we've done everything necessary to begin to flow their equipment out. And obviously what we have, not everything has to move by air. We're blessed to have, perhaps a larger number of seaports and ground lines of communication in Iraq than we do in Afghanistan.

So I think we have more options that when General Odierno says it's time to go, that we can look at those options to ensure we can, I think, as expeditiously as he needs us to begin to flow that equipment out. Over.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Richard. Michelle, you're next. Please go ahead.

Q Hi, General. This is Michelle Taylor with the Air Force Times.

I wanted to talk, see if you could talk a little bit more about Afghanistan. You mentioned, your priority right now is to move the MATVs there. Can you talk about how many you have to move, what other equipment you're looking at that needs to be moved for the plus-up? And you mentioned, again, that the options for moving equipment into Afghanistan is slightly smaller than in Iraq.

Can you talk about how you plan to move all that equipment into that country?

GEN. MCMAHON: Sure, Michelle. And again, thanks for joining the conversation.

Really, as I mentioned, what I worry about mostly at night is ensuring that I can flow both MATVs, which are newly produced in the United States and flowing into theater, as well as MRAPs, most of which are flowing out of Iraq and then going through a refurbishing program before we flow them into Afghanistan, of being able to get a variety of different versions of the MRAPs and all those MATVs going in to Afghanistan.

Talk a little bit more about the quantity of stuff, we have engineering equipment that will flow forward. We have unit equipment required to support our units that are moving in beyond the theater-procured equipment and the vehicles that I've already mentioned. And we have the sustainment requirement that continue to grow because we have more personnel in Afghanistan.

And so what we have to do is find that balance point based upon what are the options for movement, whether they move on the ground or in the air, what the priority of those requirements are, how soon they have to be there or can we delay. And then how do we orchestrate all of that taking place? And to that point, I talked a little about synchronization.

So what we have on the ground is historically just the Pakistani ground lock that comes up and breaks into two points at the Chaman gate and the Torkham gate flowing into Afghanistan.

We recognized that that was, quite frankly, very tenuous ground line of communication that we didn't want to put all of our eggs in.

And so over the past couple of years, we've worked aggressively to open up a northern distribution network that runs through the -- all across through Europe and then into the northern and central Asia that -- through places like Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, through that area that then flows into northern Afghanistan, and which has given us a tremendous additional capability on the ground.

And so whatever we can put on the ground we are, and it's finding the balance between the three major gates coming into Afghanistan.

Now, within a year, what we want to do is put our most important priority of material in the air and so, right now, we're flying all of our MRAPs and MATVs into Afghanistan. We're looking at some additional ways to get them there through multi-modal, for example, we're looking at in one case of being able to ship large number of MATVs to a port and then flying them forward from there. We'll look at multiple options doing that.

But the reality is what I want to be able to do is get all of this critical stuff in place before the war fighter gets there so that I don't burn boots on the ground without their equipment and making sure that we do it in the timeline that the president, the secretary of Defense, the commander of Central Command and General McChrystal have laid out for us.

So it's that balance, really, that's important and the synchronization that's necessary to make that happen.

Q A quick follow-up, sir, if I might. What kind of timeline are you working against here?

GEN. MCMAHON: The president has stated that he'd like everything in place by 31 August. And so he is my commander-in-chief. His words were clear.

And that's what I understand the requirement to be and that's what I'm working towards.

Q Thanks a lot, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Michelle. Jeff, you're next. Please go ahead.

Q Excuse me. Hi, general, this is Jeff Schogol with Stars and Stripes.

We had a story a while ago, a blog a while ago about Russia allowing lethal supplies to be flown into Afghanistan through its territory.

Whatever happened on that front?

GEN. MCMAHON: Right now, I can tell you, Jeff, that we are moving, our focus right now is not to move lethal equipment through the northern distribution network. We're not ready to do that. At some point in the future, that may happen, but we're not doing that today.

Q Right. But isn't the northern distribution network separate from this agreement that allows the U.S. to fly troops and equipment via Russia?

GEN. MCMAHON: Jeff, I don't think that I am qualified to answer that question for you. I would defer that one, unfortunately, to my friends in Central Command.

Q Okay. And before I go, can you talk at all about, elaborate on more of the challenges of getting MATVs once they've arrived in Afghanistan out to troops?

GEN. MCMAHON: Sure. That's a great question. You know, as is with any case, what we're looking for is synchronization of all the steps, whether it's the building of the MATV, whether it's the transportation of the MATV. It's the preparation once we get it in place and then aligning and making sure that the forces are available.

So the challenge is ensuring that when our forces are ready to pick up an MATV that they're trained and ready to accomplish that. As in any case, it's a matter of building the correct timing to be able to accomplish that. And so every day with everything that we're doing, concurrent flow of new forces in with forces already in contact as you know, it's being able to create the synchronization necessary to accomplish that without adversely affecting ongoing operations.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Jeff. And Greg, you are next. Please go ahead.

Q Yeah. Greg Grant here from Defense Tech. I'd be curious to hear about how the supply lines are going through Pakistan and generally on the land-based supply lines, just what concerns you? Are

there any single points of failure you see out there? And what areas do you see as most threatened?

GEN. MCMAHON: Clearly, as I mentioned before, Greg, one of the things that I worry about each and every night are those ground lines of communication. First of all, there's really only two, there's the northern distribution network that I talked about previously. Secondly, there is the ground line of communication that comes up through Pakistan and then moves into Afghanistan.

Let me talk about the Karachi lot first. From the port up through Pakistan and into Afghanistan, the infrastructure that those commercial trucks move on is not like, as you know, what we would find in the United States of America. There are no four lanes, six lane or eight-lane superhighways. And so that becomes part of the challenge as we go through some of the very difficult areas along those lines and through the passes, that adds additional challenge and risk for movement.

The folks that we have that are providing this valuable service to us, again, are commercial drivers. They're not military members. And so there is a challenge of ensuring that they're qualified to do what they do, and we rely on the private sector to ensure that they have the skills they need to make that drive.

And the other issue is, as you have seen periodically, is that there are always security issues along those lines. And so we worry about that as well.

On the northern distribution network, the infrastructure is a little bit more structured and we have the ability to leverage rail more effectively because of the rail lines that are already in. And so that reduces some of the challenges that we face versus coming up, the Pakistani ground lines of communication.

Does that answer your question?

Q Yeah. And the difference between the two lines, I'm guessing, most food, fuel and water goes through Pakistan and then more sensitive equipment is coming in through rail in the north. Is that accurate?

GEN. MCMAHON: What I would tell you is that we use both ground lines for class one. We use both ground lines for class four subsistence for materials, building materials, on things that I would consider sensitive. That's part of what we would fly in, just to ensure security.

Q So all vehicles, pretty much, then?

GEN. MCMAHON: I wouldn't want to characterize it like that. I think vehicles with sensitive material would normally, predominately be moved through the air and it's really more a matter of the prioritization on the vehicles, how quickly we can get them into theater.

But there are vehicles that will move along the ground lines of communication.

Q And just quickly, what's your current flow rate of MATVs into Afghanistan?

GEN. MCMAHON: I'd rather not talk to that for operational security reasons. I know you understand.

Q Gotcha. Okay. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir, and thank you, Greg. We're coming close to the bloggers roundtable so I just -- most of you all asked two questions each. So what I want to do is I want to turn it back over to the general for any closing thoughts. And if anyone has any follow-on questions, everyone knows my e-mail address, please send it to me and I will make sure I forward it.

Sir, I want to turn it back over to you if you'd like to end with any closing thoughts today.

GEN. MCMAHON: Sure. Thank you very much again, Jennifer, for giving me the opportunity to talk about something that I'm really, really proud of and that's the logistics nation that we have under Central Command and U.S. Transportation Command's guidance that's allowing us to be as effective as we are today in being able to move all of the materials, both sustainment and unit equipment into the theater.

And the other key point that is part of that team are all the commercial partners that we have that allow this to happen. We could not accomplish what we do today without the teaming between the commercial sector and the military sector, not only to prepare the equipment, to prepare the sustainment, but also to move that forward. And I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the Defense Logistics Agency, which is doing a phenomenal job of preparing all of these materials necessary to flow them into theater as well, whether it's the class one foodstuffs, whether it is the class four building materials -- and essentially in Afghanistan as you know, we're building forward operating bases in many locations.

All of this takes place because of the teamwork between military and industry, between private and public sector movement teams and because everyone is single-focused to ensure that the warfighter has what they need when they need it.

Again, Jennifer, thanks to you and DOD Public Affairs for giving me this opportunity. Over.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. And thank you for the bloggers that participated and journalists today.

Just to add a note for everyone, to access the audio file and the transcript of today's bloggers roundtable, simply go to www.dodlive.mil and click on "bloggers roundtable."

As soon as the transcript is completed by Fed News, I'll make sure everyone that participated today will receive it via e-mail, and we'll upload it as well.

Again, you've been listening to U.S. Air Force Major General Robert McMahon. He's a director of Central Command Deployment and Distribution Center.

Thank you, sir, very much for participating today and for everyone on the call.

This ends today's roundtable.

GEN. MCMAHON: Thank you very much, Jennifer.

END.